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(7) New

A SERMON,
ON THE
CHRISTIAN NECESSITY
OF
WAR;

BY
WILLIAM H. GOODRICH,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, CLEVELAND.

PREACHED APRIL 21, 1861.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

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S E R M O N .

MARK 13: 7.

WHEN YE SHALL HEAR OF WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS, BE YE NOT TROUBLED; FOR SUCH THINGS MUST NEEDS BE; BUT THE END SHALL NOT BE YET.

How strange the contrasts of character and influence which unite in Christ. He is the Prince of Peace. Angels herald his birth with songs of goodwill to men. Yet he declares with emphasis, that he "came not to send peace on the earth" but a sword." His teachings, that out of his teachings shall spring the bitterest divisions of mankind; divisions which shall rend the closest fellowships of life, and make "a man's foes to be they of his own household." He sheds his richest benedictions on his followers, and bequeaths to them his own peace; and yet, when just about to leave them, he bids them not wonder at wide-spread and devastating wars, "for such things must needs be."

The key to these contradictions is not difficult to find. It lies in the closing words of the text, "for the end shall not be yet." "The end" is peace. The issue of these centuries of strife and turmoil, under which even Chris-

tendom has groaned, is in the mild reign of Immanuel. Every change, every contest of parties, every revolution, every hard-fought field of battle, every victory and every seeming defeat is only a necessary condition of that long, pacific reign of Christ when "nations shall learn war no more."

Our Saviour left such words on record in order to prevent, in his disciples, and in the early Church, an impatient expectation of his second coming. He well knew, what experience has constantly illustrated, that his followers would be tempted to look on every great event in history as the signal of his speedy appearing. Even while the Apostles yet lived, they had occasion to correct these eager and restless expectations of his second advent; and it may be safely said, that there has not been one great political disturbance, one war or rumor of war, down to that which now broods over both continents, which has not excited in multitudes of minds the anticipation, that it was to usher in the last times and be followed by the presence and glory of the Prince of Peace. The religious community of England, especially, has been flooded with books and sermons, in which the last war with Russia and the impending conflicts over the Italian Kingdom, are expounded in the light of prophecy, and made to foreshadow the near approach of a personal reign of Christ. And though we have not generally fallen into this habit of applying prophecy to our land and times, we have settled down into another persuasion equally false. Regarding our country as the last and best and most Christian of all nations, we have felt that

the great conflicts which might vex the world elsewhere, were not to disturb our peace. Here, on these new shores, delivered from many of the vices and errors of European governments, we have hoped to glide serenely on into that new order of society, which is imaged to us as the end of promise and prophecy.

Out of this dream of security we are at length awakened. We behold war as a reality upon us. We read the detail of actual conflict. We catch the rumors of gathering armies, threatening our Capital. We see our friends, our children, devoting themselves to their country in the hour of her need, and going forth in sober earnest to fight her battles. We find our own hearts thrilled with strange emotion ; at once beating with new impulses of patriotism, and glowing with indignation at those, once our brethren, who are now traitors and deadly foes.

Yes, these are strange times to a true American. If we had been desiring at heart a dissolution of this Union, something would have told us, long ago, to prepare for a crisis like this. If we had meditated or practised any infringement on the rights of our countrymen, conscience would have accused us and made us expect their resentment. If, for any cause, we had been tempted to violate the spirit of our liberties ; had arrested, harrassed or murdered peaceable men, of training and opinions different from ours, who were dwelling or traveling among us ; then we might have anticipated that such outrages would bring a reckoning. If we had for years been harboring conspirators against our government, and had allowed them to educate our young men to disloyalty, and furnish

them not merely with arguments but with arms for treason; then, indeed, we should have been looking for coming war. Then we should have seen, months ago, many among us organizing themselves for this emergency. But we have been conscious of no such temper. We have cherished no such designs. We have had no wish for our government but that it might abide in permanence, in honor, and in blessing to us all. We have had no aims which were not subject to its laws, and desired no advantages save those given by its constitution. Therefore it is, that upon the mass of this nation, war breaks with a strange astonishment. Therefore it is, that, from the peaceable pursuits of honest citizens, we rouse to this unsought conflict with tenfold indignation.

Let us, then, learn of Christ to-day, what our habits and disposition have led us to forget, that "*Such things must needs be.*"

There is a divine necessity even for war. Christian men and Christian governments must needs sometimes take up the sword. Evil will sometimes become so violent and crime so bold, that force must be met by force, and the Christian soldier become the reluctant but thorough instrument of divine vengeance. How long this hard necessity of war will linger upon earth, we know not. Enough for us that "the end shall not be yet." Christianity has done much to abate the frequency of warfare. It has taught princes and states to regard it as their last resort, when once it was their first. It has infused even into the horrors of actual combat, a spirit of humanity, and shown that there may be stern and victorious war-

fare in which there is no element of hate. It has thus mitigated the malice, even while it has left untouched the severity of war. But it has not yet done away with the necessity of forts and arsenals, of frowning batteries by sea and shore, or of gory battle-fields. Nor will it do away with these, till it has removed out of the heart of man and out of human society those weaknesses and ills which are cured only by this bitter medication. So long as Sin, the old and rooted malady of our race, remains uneradicated, so long it will have its occasional eruptions on the surface of society, so long will its gathering ulcers break in scenes of carnage and terror.

If it be asked, more particularly, why and how long war must vex the earth, the first answer will be, *till human government itself is needless.*

So long as mankind is to be marshaled by nations, divided by boundaries, and ruled by power, so long war must remain among the necessary experiences of man. We may image to ourselves a State where unfailing wisdom rules, where no inward treachery can lurk, or foreign foe molest, but we shall find no such government on earth. We may dream of a golden age, in which the world is made up, not of separate nations, but of one great family, self-ruled by common love, but, wake up where we may in this world, we shall "find that it was a dream." That new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness is not yet. And the first fact on the surface of society is that mankind must be governed. The nation must have its head. Supreme authority, whatever be its source, must sit somewhere in embodied strength; and

the higher the authority, the more certain must be its power to command and execute. We all feel insecure when weakness and vacillation hold the helm of State. We welcome with instinctive hope, the voice of strong and high decision. For we are born to know, that behind the form of government there must be a fact ; behind its words there must be deeds ; behind its statutes, force to make them good. Just as each single law must have its single sanction, so a government, if it be government, must have its hidden might, ready to crush out treason, to spring upon the foe, and guard and vindicate its sovereign honor. And this is *War*. This is the just penalty which the State executes upon its enemies ; with which it defends its friends. It may slumber long in magazine and arsenal. It may but brood and mutter and frown its threatening from the gloomy fort's embrasure or the black bulwarks of the fleet. But even in silence it is a necessity, and at any hour, in any government, the whole public weal, the very glory and existence of the State may rest on the swift marshaling of this hidden energy of war, to quench the traitor or the foe. Not lightly, not without full meaning, is it recognised in God's word, that the supreme power in every nation shall bear the sword. Scepters and crowns are but baubles, and constitutions and oaths are but the idle wind, unless behind them lies the strength of armies. Peace on earth there could be none for fallen man, were it not for the possibility of war.

War " must needs be " on earth till *every great question of principle and right is settled, and settled forever.*

What one of these liberties which we hold precious, has not been fought out and won with heavy sacrifice and blood? Have we the right of free speech? Have we a free press? Have we liberty to come and go unwatched and unquestioned? Have we freedom to worship God according to our conscience? Have we the protection of just law and the right of self-government? We have them because other men in other days, asserted them, fought for them, conquered them, and left them a costly legacy to us. Nay, do we own these bodies, and command this mind and will, this talent and this time, all which make up our life? We own them because there were found those, long ago, who rose against oppression, broke their shackles, and made good the divine right of every man to full property in himself. The whole history of the world has been the history of the conquest of rights. Especially since the man Christ Jesus came and taught and died for us, there have been springing out of his words and his examples, ever fresh ideas of justice and humanity and self-sacrifice for the truth's sake, which no power on earth has been able to withstand. This Gospel is the charter of human rights, delivered from the Almighty throne, and sealed with the blood of the Son of God. Christianity is first a way of individual salvation from sin and death eternal, but it is also a way of deliverance and restoration to a sad and downcast world. It is glad-tidings to the poor, the wronged, the suffering, under every form of oppression. Through its inspiration and guidance, the weak in every land have been rising into rightful place and power. Leaving out

of view the slow struggles of liberty in the past, what changes have we, ourselves, witnessed in the governments and people of the old world ! What a decay of tyranny ! What a growth of popular rights ! What a fear of public opinion on the part even of absolute monarchs ! Our hearts exult to-day, in the midst of our indignation, as we look across the sea on the new and free Italy which is rising on the wrecks of tyranny centuries old. These conquests of right, have undoubtedly been the fruit, in part, of argument and reason. Truth, diffused widely and testified by men at the peril of prison and death, has sowed precious seed. But you will mark it as a fact of general history, that in the establishment of great rights, and the overthrow of great wrongs, there has always come a point where the issue must be fought out in battle. Rooted wrong and ancient despotism never yield that last point, till they are confronted with force greater than their own. Selfish power, even when deserted by its old advocates, and disowned by the surrounding world, will always make one last stand, and will yield only when conquered and abased. As in the natural world, the elements can find their equilibrium only through the flash of lightning and the roar of the tempest, even so the stagnant wrongs and surcharged evils of humanity break and spend themselves in the storm and shock of war. Every great conflict has left a freer air and a clearer sky to man. Every great battle-field has settled, or helped to settle, some principle of human right.

We, indeed, have been hoping that this severe necessity

had passed by. We thought that henceforth reason and argument and the peaceful ballot were to be the forces which were to purify and elevate mankind. We have seen, in Christian England, great measures of humanity and great constitutional reforms accomplished, with no conflict but that of free discussion, and no revolution but that of public sentiment. We have believed that this, hereafter, was to be the law of progress in civilized nations. In civilized nations, perchance, yes. But how it might be in a land where a high Christian civilization was wedded with barbarism, and barbarism such as all Christendom abhors; how it might be in a nation, where, side by side with every liberty which is precious to man, has stood, and grown mightier every day, a system whose perpetuity requires that those liberties should be restricted and denied; this we have not taken into the account. And now the question has come squarely upon us whether we will relinquish these hard-earned liberties, or whether we will hold them in battle, and cement them, if need be, with blood. With multitudes of our fellow-countrymen in these alienated States, we have no controversy. To the institution of Slavery, considered as an evil entailed on them by our common ancestors, much as we lament it, we could have no active hostility. But to the system, as shaped and organized by its modern advocates into a political despotism; to the theory of government which it engenders; to its aggressions and demands; to its insolent attempt to dictate our opinions and decide what men we shall elect to office; to the spirit of conspiracy, intrigue and violence

which is its natural fruit ; every principle of freedom which we prize is irreconcilably hostile. Reason has failed to remove these differences. Argument and persuasion have been wasted. Compromises have been vain. The laws and the Constitution have been set at naught. All that remains for us, to-day, is either to buy a base peace by the surrender of our liberties, or to establish them firmer than ever with the red right hand of war.

Let us not think, moreover, that the conflict into which we are entering, is to terminate merely with these local interests. We cannot fight the battles of our country against treason, without fighting at the same time a battle of freedom for mankind. If the Revolution which gave this land its birth, sent forth a wave of influence which rocked the thrones of the old world, and whose vibrations still tremble in the heart of nations, so the issues of this contest are to be felt with swifter impulse in every land that knows the American name. Yes, we have great work on hand. We are to prove in the face of all nations, that a popular government is strong enough to punish treason. We are to show that a people can be as loyal to their elected rulers as to a hereditary king. We are to show, that a government can be defended and maintained as thoroughly by the rallying hosts of freemen, fresh from honest toil, as by the costly machinery of standing armies. We are to show at what price we hold our rights, what sacrifice we will make to keep them, how deeply the principles of justice have sunk into the American heart, how wisely we can use the difficult advantage, which may be put into our power, of striking

the death-blow of Slavery on this continent. For all these issues seem to lie wrapped up in the contest. We shall begin by vindicating our own freedom. But when we have thoroughly done that, we shall be apt to find that, unawares, we have shattered and cast down into the dust, the last power in Christendom, which dared to maintain the right to enslave a fellow-man.

Thank God, that we are counted worthy of the trial ! Thank God, that he has called us to this high service for our country and mankind ! that from a career of prosperous ease, such as has demoralized many a noble race, he has summoned us to this great toil, and bid us bear the brunt of such a conflict. We, too, may play a great part in history. The men of every future generation will tell how we, of this young republic, rose in our might, proved our virtue, turned back the tide of traitorous usurpation, and vindicated freedom before a grateful world ; or they will speak of us as of those who sold their birthright, faltered in the hour of trial, and slunk away, to leave a long track of shame, which ages could not wipe out.

Who questions which record will be ours ? Who doubts that this people will be true to its liberties, through years, if need be, of wasting war ? Who doubts, that these principles of free government, which were wrested from oppression by the valor of our sires, are dearer to us than ease or wealth or life itself ? Who does not exult in the assurance, that we of this day are to add another to those bright illustrations of the triumphs of liberty which shine in the history of the Netherlands and of Switzerland, and which make glorious the names of our fathers ?

Thank God, that their spirit lives in the American heart. Yes, this free people accept the issue. They read the meaning of the hour. Patient under long insult, calm under provocations which burned like fire into their souls, at last they rouse to this stern work of patriots. I hear no vain-glorious boasting. I see no darkening scowls of hate. But I see the grave looks of men in earnest. I see the firm glance, from eyes yet moist with tears, of men who have counted the cost, even unto death. I see grey-headed men and women bidding their sons a calm good-by, and then turning to pray to Him who knows them as his, and has aforetime heard them. I see multitudes to-day assembled in innumerable sanctuaries, consecrating themselves anew to their God and to their country. I hear, from every hillside in New England, from the thronged life of the great cities, from along these inland seas, and across the wide Western plains, the tramp of the gathering armies of the free; and I *know*, that with this host goes forth the unseen presence and the might of a just God. He may not crown our arms with instant victory. He may choose to discipline us by disasters and try us with reverses. But He has no providence which sides with traitors. He lends his aid to no band of robbers and conspirators. He never will suffer, in this age, a government based on the doctrine of liberty to the strong and servitude to the weak. He never will recognise a people to whom "might makes right." Sooner or later, in his own way and time, he will turn back the tide of rebellion, and give the victory to our arms. Let us live for that end, though it be not

yet. Let us struggle for it, through whatever sacrifice. Let us be ready to die for it, if need be. Let us thank the God of our fathers that he is our God also, and that even war cannot separate us from his care and love ; nay, that, in this cause, the consecration of ourselves to our country's service, may be the noblest duty we can render to our Redeemer and our God.

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